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ABSTRACT

A system for classifying English predicates into four families that account for all forms, moods, voices, and tenses is examined as an approach to teach grammar to students of English as a second language (ESL). It is suggested that by focusing on one family at a time, then building by combining these families, students can learn more readily to comprehend, produce, and manipulate conjugations and tenses. The following discriminators, or elements of English predicate formation, are examined: simple action form, modal form, have form, and be form. The system can be simplified for more elementary language levels while still retaining the four groupings; for example, eliminating the past participle in family four, or limiting the number of modals in family two. It is suggested that work with the families begin at the end, family four. Reasons for this include the ubiquity of "be" in English sentences, the simplicity of the interrogative and negative constructions, and the range of expression the use of "be" plus complements allows. From family four, the teacher can return to the beginning and family one. It is suggested that the true determiners for grouping verbs are the same ones that secondarily discriminate between person, time, mood, and voice, and are generally referred to as auxiliaries. They make up the core of all predicate formation in English, and by using each one separately or in concert with others, the entire spectrum of English verb tenses and voice can be produced and their understanding simplified. (SW)

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The Four Families of English Predicate Formation

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ESL grammar is generally presented in ways that make sense to teachers and textbook writers, rather than to students. This reliance on native language attitudes (teaching as we were taught) and assumptions of ordinal logic and structural relativity thus turns those who should be facilitators into facilitatees. For example, a possible structural presentation to an elementary L2 class might be:

I have a book.

It is red.

I like it.

On the surface these three sentences seem simple, but it is my contention that here we find three distinct families of predicate formation and that by focusing on but one family at a time, then building by combining these families with one another, students' ability to comprehend, produce, and manipulate conjugations and tenses can be expedited greatly and a self-checking system provided to minimize error, particularly in writing.

This system is based upon a breakdown of the English predicate into four families, an atomization from which the molecular construction of all English predicate forms, moods, voices, and tenses is derived. An example of one of these families and its possible presentation to L2 students is given below:

This is my book.

It is red.

I am reading it.

It is interesting.

I am interested.

By organizing structure presentation around the constant Be, syntactic integrity in interrogative, affirmative, and negative formation can be guaranteed. In addition, the stative relationship of these five sentences is emphasized, impressing upon the student the clear tie between form and function, the interrelationship between structure and meaning in all predicates.

English verb forms have been traditionally organized semantically, grouping them according to time, mood, voice, aspect, and the like, that is, according to function. Generally, this is done so that linguists can talk to linguists. It is also done by native language learners, who acquired the sense of a sentence long before they were exposed to its rules. The assumption has apparently evolved that this is the logical way in which language should be analyzed (and, one would assume, taught). However, in the case of L2 learners, this assumption can lead to problems. Fundamental among these is the simple fact that cultural concepts of time, mood, and other "obvious" discriminators of sense vary from one people to another. Another problem is that for L2 learners the message is the medium; their vehicle is also their destination. It becomes vital, therefore, that they understand the sequence of operating the controls first, since wherever else they may travel, their ultimate aim is the operation itself.

In order to achieve this operational facility, a pattern must be established, one in which structurally related components are grouped. By exposure to these groupings, the semantics of sentences can be extrapolated in much the same way that archaeologists determine the function of a ruin such as Stonehenge by first analyzing its form. What, then, determines the groupings of verbs? The true determiners are the same ones which secondarily discriminate between person, time, mood, and voice, and are generally referred to as auxiliaries. Rather, they make up the core of all predicate formation in English, and by using each one separately or in concert with others, the entire spectrum of English vert tenses and voice can be produced and their understanding simplified.

Having explained the rationale behind this organization, all that is left to do is to present the descriminators, the elements of English predicate formation. They are:

1. Simple Action form
2. Modal form
3. Have form
4. Be form

The order of the four elements is not arbitrary; when complex combining takes place, ascending numerical progression becomes vital and must be adhered to strictly. Beyond this single caveat, the following diagram should be largely self-explanatory. There may be some questions concerning the inclusion of certain parts of speech as objects or complements. This concern is probably most intense in the case of the infinitive in Family Three. As the diagram points out, American English would transfer the Have-Object and Have-Infinitive combinations to Family One (Simple Action). This modification may reflect a cultural mutation of the attitude toward possession (from stative to active), but this explanation is only speculative, albeit convenient.

Nonetheless, for the purposes of this organizational system, and as a practical exigency, infinitives might best be thought of as nouns which connote intent or direction. This idea is useful not only in the context of this system but later, when the problem of verbs taking gerunds or infinitives arises. If a foundation has been established wherein the gerunds are nouns of condition, then infinitives as nouns of intent or direction will automatically be paired with verbs of decision, or in cases

where a verb might take either, the infinitive will convey a more urgent and decisive feeling. For example:

I like boxing.

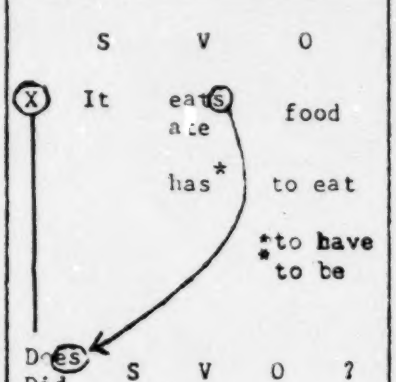
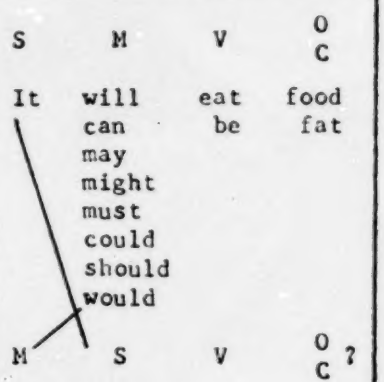
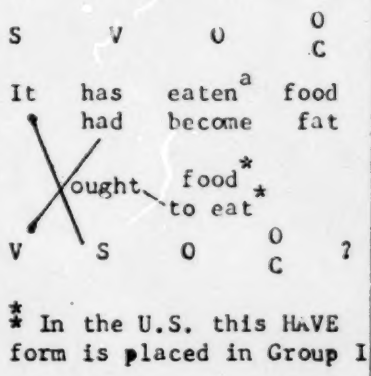
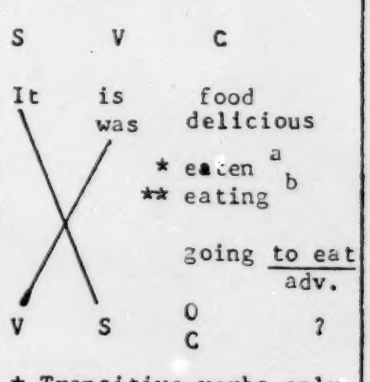
I like to box.

Another example of the infinitive as indicator of intent is in Be Going To future. Actually, it is the joining of the two above qualities to create a concept, and it vividly illustrates the form-function relationship.

STATE (Condition) GOAL (Intent)

I am going . . . . . to study

Substitutions can then be made in either the condition of intent, or both, to create new meanings within the same sequential framework (I am going to eat; I am planning to study). This is one example of the manipulation which can be performed once the system of families is established. The following diagram is instructor-oriented, with explanatory notes. A diagram for student use is included at the end of this paper, following the suggested methodology.

I. SIMPLE ACTION form	II. MODAL form	III. HAVE form	IV. BE form
 *See Group III (**)		 ** In the U.S. this HAVE form is placed in Group I [a] The past participle represents experience as a possession.	 * Transitive verbs only ** Two participles may be joined: It is being eaten.
Group I is distinct and does not combine, except** through the use of infinitives	Groups II, III, and IV can be combined to form new tenses, but they must be joined in numerically ascending order (II / III; II / IV; III / IV; II / III / IV)	EXAMPLE: II / IV[b] It will BE eating Future Continuous	[a] OBJECT COMPLEMENT: The past participle takes the position of an adjective describing a PASSIVE condition. [b] SUBJECT COMPLEMENT: The present participle takes the position of an adjective describing an ACTIVE condition. (Both, naturally, serve as predicate adjectives, as opposed to food, the predicate nominative.)

Notice that the Simple Action form does not combine with any other except through the use of infinitives, the nature of which has already been defined for the purposes of this organizational system as being not primarily verbal. This quality of separateness in the Simple Action becomes significant when complex predicate creation is attempted and can by itself provide sufficient warning to prevent the sorts of verbal accidents to which L2 learners are so often prone. For example, "I am want food" becomes impossible because it combines the first family with the fourth, and out of order as well.

Family Two is syntactically and grammatically the simplest, while at the same time being the most complex semantically of the four families. The fact that the modal form remains the same for all persons, that it uses the simple, dictionary form of the verb, and that question formation is such an easy matter of subject-verb inversion makes the modal form the most regular structurally. However, it does describe mood, and so is as ephemeral as its name, implying time, possibility, permission, obligation, attitude, ability, and innumerable other qualities with a mere few words. As the chart shows, these few words are increased slightly by the addition of the sometimes-modals need and dare and the quasi-modal phrase had better.

Family Three is more difficult. In fact, it is the most difficult, due almost entirely to the transatlantic metamorphosis have underwent, moving from a state of possession to an act of acquisition, which change moved it, in the diagram's asterisked examples, to Family One, giving it the Do auxiliary for questions and negatives. The elegance that many Americans perceive in British English is attributable in some part to

its economic use of _have_, as opposed to the clunking, insistent tone of America's active possessive. _Ought_, participial form of _owe_, serves as a substitute here when used with the infinitive, as in the question "Ought I to study?"; however, it may also function as a participle with _had_: "Had I ought to study?" Keeping with its position in a less insistent family, it naturally conveys a less insistent tone than _have to_.

Family Four is, simply, the verb _be_ with complements, and there are only four complements: nouns (proper and common), adjectives, present participles, and past participles. The key to Family Four's syntactic-semantic integrity is the concept of the participles not as verbals, but rather as quasi-adjectives (or adjectival nouns) describing condition. The present participle describes an active condition, serving as the subject (actor) complement: "I am happy; I am skiing." The past participle serves as an object (recipient) complement describing a passive condition, and requiring, naturally, a transitive verb: "I am sad; my skis are broken." This concept of the past participle has already been diagramed in Family Three, in which it appears as an object expressing experience possessed (indicated by the use of _have_). For example, I have my memories: I have eaten sushi in Tokyo, I have gone to Alaska, I have seen the Grand Canyon. So too, when one becomes dominated, or when one is put in a submissive or inactive position, one shares that insubstantial quality of the past (which is what we really mean when we refer to _would_ as the past form of _will_; actually, a more accurate label for these two might be _soft focus_ and _sharp focus_). The important thing to remember in all of this discussion of participles is that they are no

longer verbs; they have evolved into another species, descriptors. As their forms have changed, so has their syntactic position and their function. They are now no nearer being verbs than a dog is being a cat.

We are now prepared for the process of amalgamation. Within a family this is no problem. In Family Four, for example, two complements may be joined with the verb, so long as the subordinate past participle follows the dominant present participle, as in "I am being bored." However, in combining families, care must be taken. There are three rules which must be obeyed without exception:

1. Family One is excluded from all combinations (except, as already discussed, through the use of the non-verbal infinitive).
2. All combining must be done in ascending numerical order.
3. Where two families join, a defining aspect of each must be retained.

An example of Rule Three is:

Family Two: Modal + Dictionary Verb

plus

Family Four: Be + Complement

Since a basic requirement of Family Two is the use of the dictionary form of the verb, Family Four must comply with <u>be</u> (rather than <u>am</u>, <u>is</u>, <u>are</u>, <u>was</u>, or <u>were</u>...or <u>been</u>). Also, since Family Four requires the use of <u>be</u>, the verb following the modal <u>can be nothing else</u> (as this sentence demonstrates).

On the following page is a sample exercise used in class in which another combination is done and variously illustrated.

SAMPLE STUDENT EXERCISE:

Combine III (past) and IV[a]. Use any transitive verb you like.

1. I _____.

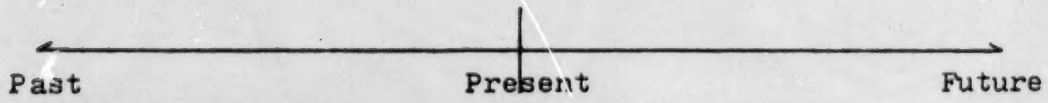
2. You _____.

3. He
   She
   It _____.

4. We _____.

5. They _____.

Now, fill in the time line below as you think it should look.



Draw a simple picture of your first sentence.

As long as the instructions are followed, any and all predicate forms (allowing for the subjunctive were, which remains syntactically sound) may be produced with guaranteed success. Future Perfect Continuous? Voila:

I will have (2)
been (3)
studying (4)

The system can be symplified for more elementary language levels while still retaining the four groupings (for example, eliminating the past participle in Family Four, or limiting the number of modals in Family Two). In addition, each family can be presented separately, on individual sheets (this might be particularly advisable with Family One). These are merely the building blocks; the actual construction is left to the individual.

Still, there is a methodology which may prove superior to other approaches. It is suggested that work with the families begin at the end, Family Four. The reasons for this must be obvious to any experienced instructor: the ubiquity of be in English sentences, the simplicity of the interrogative and negative constructions, the range of expression the use of be + complements allows. From Family Four, go back to the beginning and Family One. In addition to allowing a return to numerical order, this sets up an opportunity to contrast sharply and immediately the structural and semantic qualities of the two most oft-confused predicate families.

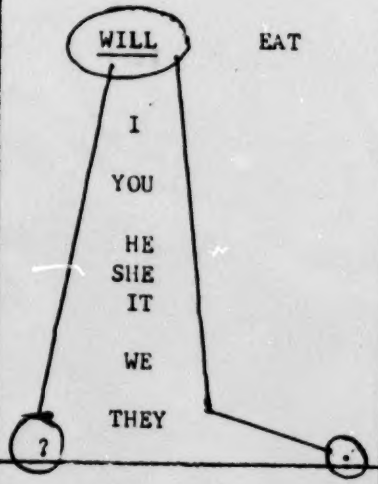
Now that order has been established, it becomes merely a matter of moving to Family Two, Family Three, and Family Four. As to vertical movement on the chart relative to the horizontal progression from family to family, it can be either gradual, moving down as each horizontal pass is made, or dramatic, presenting all the possibilities within a single family, then moving to the next. The former approach might be more appropriate in most cases, as it allows the past participle to be introduced last, both as a part of Family Three and as the bottom rung of Family Four's complement ladder. Naturally, the presentation of the families, as well as the combinations, is subject to the curricular requirements of individual programs and their texts, which is as it should be. This system is not meant to supplant the established, but to supplement it. Indeed, the best possible way in which the families can be used may be to draw large facsimiles of them and place them on the wall as sources of student reference and teacher illustration.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the organizational system presented here is no panacea; neither is it a finished product. It has undergone too many revisions already to permit that sort of smug assessment. However it offers a direction of thought, an attempt at concrete depictions of the intangible in English, providing logical links and systematic controls through which the language may be clarified for both instructors and students, and so facilitating its mastery by, rather than of, both learners.

Family 1: SIMPLE ACTION	Family 2: MODAL	Family 3: HAVE	Family 4: BE
I eat You eat He / She / It / One eats (food) We eat They eat --- Do I/you/we/they eat? Does he/she/it/one eat?	I will eat You He / She / It / One We / They --- Will (X) eat?	I have You have He / She / It / One has eaten We have They have --- Have I/you/we/they eaten? Has he/she/it/one	I am You are He / She / It / One is We are They are --- Am I Is he/she/it/one ? Are you/we/they a person / happy / eating / eaten / people
I You He / She / It / One ate (food) We / They --- Did (X) eat?	I would eat --- Would (X) eat?	I had eaten --- Had (X) eaten?	I was You were He / She / It / One was We were They were --- Was I/he/she/it/one Were you/we/they a person / happy / eating / eaten / people / happy? / going?

SINGLE FAMILY FOCUS

II. MODAL form



FUTURE